

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO.  
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

**1364**

# How to Use the Dictionary

**Lloyd E. Smith**

**WITH A NOTE ON OTHER  
REFERENCE WORKS**



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## HOW TO USE THE DICTIONARY

### WHAT A DICTIONARY IS

Everyone knows that a dictionary is a rather large book, filled with words arranged in alphabetical order. He knows, too, that there are also small dictionaries—to fit the pocket, perhaps—and possibly he knows that a small dictionary is *abridged*, while the larger dictionaries are usually *unabridged*. But it is surprising how few people know how to find what they are looking for in a dictionary. Many people who own a good dictionary sometimes have no idea of the wealth of information it contains, information which might be at their finger tips if they only knew how to find it.

A *dictionary*, according to the definition of the word given in Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, is: "A book containing the words of a language, usually arranged alphabetically, with explanations of their meanings." This definition is primarily what a dictionary is—but modern dictionaries contain a great deal more than words and their meanings, as will soon be explained.

The word *dictionary* means literally a book of words; a dictionary is sometimes called a *wordbook* (the German word for dictionary is literally the same as the English "wordbook").

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Dictionary comes from the word *diction*, which goes back to the Latin *dictio*, a saying or word, from *dicere*, *dictum*, to say.

Another name for a dictionary is *lexicon*. This word comes from the Greek, instead of the Latin language; the Greek word means "of or belonging to words." An author or compiler of a dictionary or a lexicon is known as a *lexicographer*.

Dictionaries may be of various kinds. If a dictionary is referred to without further explanation, a dictionary of the entire English language, possibly abridged, is usually meant. But the possibilities of variety are clearly summarized in the article "Dictionary" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition:

Dictionaries were originally books of reference explaining the words of a language or of some part of it. As the names of things, as well as those of persons and places, are words, and often require explanation even more than other classes of words, they were necessarily included in dictionaries, and often to a very great extent. In time, books were devoted to them alone, and were limited to special subjects, and these have so multiplied, that dictionaries of things now rival in number and variety those of words or of languages, while they often surpass them in bulk. There are dictionaries of biography and history, real and fictitious, general and special, relating to men of all countries, characters and professions . . .

This articles goes on to list dictionaries of geography, bibliography, philosophy, the Bible, mathematics, natural history, zoology, botany, birds, trees, plants, flowers, chemistry, geology, mineralogy, architecture, painting, music, medicine, surgery, anatomy, pathology, physiology, diplomacy, law (canon, civil, statutory, crim-

inal), political and social sciences, agriculture, rural economy, gardening, commerce, navigation, horsemanship, military arts, mechanics, machines, manual arts, antiquities, chronology, dates, genealogy, heraldry, diplomatics, abbreviations, useful recipes and formulas, monograms, adulterations, etc., etc.

The series of Little Blue Books contains a growing list of handy pocket-sized dictionaries, which themselves indicate the variety and usefulness of reference works of this kind. Among them are *A Dictionary of Sea Terms* (Little Blue Book No. 1002), *A Dictionary of Scientific Terms* (Little Blue Book No. 452), *An International Dictionary of Authors* (Little Blue Book No. 754), *4,000 Words Often Mispronounced* (Little Blue Book No. 697), *How to Pronounce 4,000 Proper Names* (Little Blue Book No. 696), *A Rhyming Dictionary* (Little Blue Book No. 25), *A Dictionary of American Slang* (Little Blue Book No. 56), *A Dictionary of Musical Terms* (Little Blue Book No. 1204), *A Dictionary of Synonyms* (Little Blue Book No. 192), *A Dictionary of Geographical Names* (Little Blue Book No. 1259), *A Dictionary of Biblical Allusions* (Little Blue Book No. 905), *A Dictionary of Foreign Words and Phrases* (Little Blue Book No. 902), *A Dictionary of Similes* (Little Blue Book No. 1354), *A Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Little Blue Book No. 499), *A Dictionary of Familiar Quotations* (Little Blue Book No. 815), etc. There are also pocket dictionaries of French (No. 1011), Spanish (No. 1105), German (No. 637), and Italian (No. 1216).

In every dictionary, of whatever kind it may be, there will be found directions for its use. Each dictionary, of course, has its own peculiarities—its own method of treating its subject, its own standards of selection, and so on. The only way to use a dictionary to the best advantage is to familiarize oneself with the introduction to the work, making sure that its system is fully understood so that it may yield readily any information it contains.

In general, all of the major dictionaries of the English language follow a similar plan in presenting words and their definitions. That is why, in this Little Blue Book, it is possible to lay down fundamental precepts for the guidance of those who wish to use a dictionary to get the most out of it.

The abridged dictionary contains fewer words than the dictionary which aims at more completeness. Dictionaries may be abridged, or reduced, to various smaller volumes—as for desk use, for school use, for carrying in the pocket, etc. The definitions are also shortened, and the scope of the information contained in an abridged dictionary is necessarily much less than that in an unabridged work.

Even an unabridged dictionary may not be complete, if by complete one means that it contains every word ever used in a language over a period of many centuries. The usual unabridged dictionary contains between two and three thousand large pages of rather small type, ordinarily arranged in two or three columns on each page. Such a dictionary may contain as many as 400,000 different entries—

which is to say, 400,000 different vocabulary headings in alphabetical place. But a "more complete" work, the *New Oxford English Dictionary*, just completed (the preface to the first volume appeared in 1888, and the first part had appeared in 1884), runs to several volumes. The *New English Dictionary*, edited by Dr. J. A. H. Murray, begins its recording of English words with those in current use in the middle of the twelfth century and afterward up to the time each section went to press.

Because it is easier to be specific, this discussion will be based chiefly upon Webster's *New International Dictionary of the English Language*, latest edition.\* As the standard work in so many schools and colleges, as well as in publishing and editorial offices (including the Government Printing Office at Washington) throughout the country, this dictionary seems best suited for treatment in a limited booklet such as this.

### WHAT A DICTIONARY TELLS

A dictionary becomes the standard reference work for spelling, pronunciation, meaning, syllabication, etc., of words, because it records the form and limitations of any word as usage has established them. The dictionary does not dictate. The makers of any dictionary never set themselves up as judges of a language—it

\*Webster's *New International Dictionary of the English Language*, W. T. Harris, Ph.D., LL.D., Editor in Chief; F. Sturges Allen, General Editor. Copyright 1909, 1913, 1923, 1924, 1927, G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, Mass.

is their business only to observe how words are or have been used, and to record them as they find them.

As Webster's New International Dictionary puts it, in the Preface by W. T. Harris: "It is the function of a dictionary to state the meanings in which words are in fact used, not to give expression to the editor's opinions as to what their meanings should be." Again, in reference to spelling: "The principle of the New International, as of its predecessors, has been that it is the function of the dictionary, in spelling as in other particulars, to record usage rather than to create it."

The dictionary tells as much about a word as the average reader wishes to know. For example, look up the word *automobile* in the dictionary. To find a word you must know how it is spelled, or you must have some notion of how it is spelled. If you do not know how to spell the word, you will have to try several possibilities. In looking for *automobile*, you must know that it begins with "aut," instead of "ot," as some illiterate person might guess.

First, the dictionary gives you the *correct spelling* (as established by usage). If two spellings are found in current use, both spellings are listed, with the preferred spelling (determined by good literary authority) given first. If a less common spelling occurs in literature, it may be found in the regular vocabulary of the dictionary, in proper alphabetical place, with a reference to the preferred spelling, where all the information about the word is given.

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Second, the dictionary marks the proper syllabication of the word, thus: "au-to-mo-bile." This division into syllables is necessary for purposes of printing (typesetting); you can see this for yourself by glancing at the right hand edge of the pages of this book, and noting how words are broken off at the ends of syllables, with a hyphen inserted to indicate that part of the word is carried over to the next line. For ease in reading and to prevent awkward divisions, some standard of syllabication is desirable. Division into syllables according to established rules is also helpful toward correct spelling and pronunciation.

You will observe that the division into syllables in the dictionary is marked by hyphens.\* The word *automobile* in its vocabulary listing is printed in black or boldface type, so that it stands out and may be clearly and quickly seen by the eye glancing over the page in search of a particular word. The hyphens indicating syllables are quite light, you notice. In the word *automobile*, however, two syllabic divisions are marked with accents—a light accent after "au" and a heavier accent after "mo"—to indicate immediately something about the correct pronunciation of the word. When

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\*It should be explained that whenever the hyphen is part of the spelling of the word, as in compound words, the hyphen in the dictionary is made exceptionally long and heavier (blacker) than the short hyphens used to indicate syllabication. Note the word *looking-glass* on page 1274, Webster's New International. In the New Standard Dictionary hyphens in compound words are indicated by a double-hyphen, similar to an equals sign.

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an accent mark is used between syllables, the hyphen is omitted.

Third, the dictionary indicates the *correct* (or accepted) *pronunciation* of the word. This pronunciation is given with diacritical marks in parentheses following the word itself. These diacritical marks are printed at the bottom of the pages in the dictionary, showing their value in everyday words which everyone knows how to pronounce, so that you can tell at once what sound any mark indicates. More complete explanations of the various marks are given in the front of the dictionary.

Thus, for automobile, the sound of the first syllable is indicated by the letter "ô," with a mark over it like that in the word *ôrb* (bottom of page 156 in Webster's New International). This means that the first syllable of automobile is to be pronounced like the letter "o" in *orb*. The second syllable is indicated by "to," the "o" being like the "o" in *obey*. The third syllable has a long "o," like the "o" in *old*. The last syllable has a short "i," as in *ill*. By following these sounds, and placing the heavier accent on the third syllable (marked by the heavier accent mark following it), with a slight accent on the first syllable (indicated by the lighter accent mark following it), you can pronounce the word correctly.

If two or more pronunciations are widely used, both pronunciations are given, the preferred pronunciation being given first. Often, however, both pronunciations are of nearly equal standing, so if you are already pronouncing a word according to one of the listed pro-

nunciations, it is wiser to continue pronouncing it that way than to attempt to change and lead yourself into needless confusion and embarrassing hesitation in your speech.

*Important*—Many times in the dictionary you will find two or more pronunciations given, followed by a number or some other symbol. In Webster's New International it is a number, and this number refers to the Guide to Pronunciation in the front of the dictionary. By turning to this Guide, to the section corresponding to the number beside the word you are looking up, you will find further information about a disputed or variable pronunciation. Under section No. 277 of the Guide to Pronunciation in Webster's New International, some hundreds of words are listed that have variable pronunciations, with the pronunciation indicated by seven outstanding English dictionaries.

Occasionally a particular pronunciation is limited, as to scientific circles, or to Great Britain. Whenever this is the case, the dictionary adds such an explanation.

By this time you have probably noticed that the word *automobile* (page 157 of Webster's New International, column 1) is listed twice, one below the other. This brings us to the fourth fact which the dictionary tells about a word—its *parts of speech*. The first listing of automobile marks it as an *adjective*, by the abbreviation (in italic type) *a*. The second listing of automobile is a record of the word when it is a *noun* (marked *n.*).

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Other parts of speech are indicated as follows:

*a.*, adjective; *adv.*, adverb; *interj.*, interjection; *n.*, noun; *pron.*, pronoun; *v.*, verb; *prep.*, preposition; *conj.*, conjunction.

Note—Abbreviations used in a dictionary are listed alphabetically, usually in the front of the book, with explanations of what they stand for. When in doubt about the meaning of any abbreviation used in explaining a word, refer to this list of abbreviations for further information.

You will observe that the noun *automobile* has two possible pronunciations, while the adjective *automobile* has one pronunciation only. Incidentally, the complete pronunciation of *automobile* (that is, every syllable) is given after the first listing. After the noun listing, the pronunciation of the final two syllables only is given (to save space). Whenever the respelling of syllables for indicating pronunciation is found to be shortened in this way, the correct spelling of the omitted syllables may be found after the entry closely preceding or next above.

Thus, on the same page with *automobile*, the pronunciation of *autumn* (noun) is given, but no pronunciation is given after *autumn* (verb). This means that the word keeps the same pronunciation for both parts of speech.

Fifth, the dictionary gives a summary of the word's history—its origin, if known, together with related words. This is called the *etymology* of the word. Etymologies are placed in brackets [ ], following the pronunciation, which is in parentheses ( ).

The etymology or history of *automobile* is thus given in Webster's New International Dic-

tionary: "*auto+mobile*: cf. F. *automobile*." This means that the word is probably French in origin, being formed from two elements—*auto* and *mobile*. Further information about these elements may be found in the vocabulary by looking them up in their alphabetical places. Thus, *auto-* (page 156) is found to be a combining form, from the Greek for "self" ("as in automobile, self-propelled"); and *mobile* (page 1387) is from the Latin *mobilis*, from *moveare*, to move.

The abbreviation "cf."<sup>\*</sup> will be found throughout the dictionary. It means simply "compare"—it suggests to the reader that he compare the word or words which the letters "cf." precede. For example, in considering the etymology of the word automobile, "cf." suggests that the French word automobile, spelled exactly the same as the English word, be compared with it. This indicates that the English word may have been borrowed from the French language, though both elements of the word—*auto* and *mobile*—occur in English, and may be traced back to Greek and Latin origins.

Many words of classical origin have come into English through some other language—usually French—as an intermediary. Strictly, the word is of Latin or Greek origin, but a complete story of its progress into English cannot be told without indicating the possibility of an intermediate language. This was done with automobile, as explained in the preceding paragraph.

In the Preface to Webster's New International this is explained as follows: "Of words of foreign origin which did not pass through Anglo-Saxon, the most important to mention here are those which can be traced back to Latin. In many cases a French form, especially

\*Abbreviation for "confer."

often an Old French form, is the intermediary, and it is not infrequently impossible to be quite certain whether the immediate source was French (Old French) or Latin. This difficulty is often met by giving the Latin word as the source and adding at the end of the etymology the French forms with the abbreviation 'cf.' preceded by a colon. This indicates that the French word may really have been the immediate source or that the French word and the Latin word may both have been concerned in the introduction of the English one."

Often the etymology of a word will be uninteresting to anyone not a scholar. However, the histories of words are quite as often strangely fascinating. Furthermore, the origin of a word frequently aids one's comprehension of its meaning, and makes for nicer usage and a sharper distinction in sense when the word is met with again.

Sixth, the dictionary gives the *meaning* of the word—or, more strictly, its various definitions. These meanings are records of how the word has been used in literature or in speech. Frequently a word has several meanings. These are given one after another, numbered consecutively. The first definition (in Webster's New International) is the oldest meaning of the word in English; following definitions approach the present time; if many definitions are given, the technical uses are as a rule placed toward the last.

Strictly, the definition of the word *automobile* (noun), is as follows: "An automobile (see definition of *automobile*, adjective) vehicle or mechanism; especially, a self-propelled vehicle suitable for use on a street or roadway." However the modern dictionary gives more than the mere definition. Sufficient explanation is

added to provide a comprehensive (though not exhaustive) knowledge of the subject under discussion. Thus, following the definition of automobile, as quoted here, there are eight additional lines of type giving further details. This treatment of a word is called *encyclopedic*. It decidedly enhances the usefulness of the dictionary.

This is all that the dictionary tells about the word *automobile*, which was selected at random as an example. About other words the dictionary may tell all of these facts, and provide additional data as well. This other information, and how to interpret it, will be taken up a little later in this book.

### HOW TO FIND A WORD

A dictionary is useless to you unless you know how you may find the word you want as quickly as possible. The method is simple, but it is well to review certain fundamental principles of the dictionary's construction. It frequently happens that people who are sure they know how to use a dictionary cannot find what they are looking for, and they blame their own inefficiency on the makers of the dictionary. This is unfair, and unnecessary.

It must be constantly remembered that any dictionary is the result of colossal labor on the part of the men who made it. They have tried, within the arbitrary limitations of their work, to provide a reference volume that will meet the needs of the widest number of people. Always, in a book so large as an unabridged dictionary, space is at a premium. Space must be conserved wherever possible. That is why so many abbreviations are used (which, however, may be easily looked up in an alphabetical

list in the front), and why it is necessary sometimes to look in more than one place to find all the information desired.

Usually, words are looked up which are met with in reading. Such a word may be found readily because the correct spelling is available. However, if the right spelling is not known, the most likely spelling should be tried first. When you do not know how to spell a word, be patient. Look around over the page or pages which seem likely to contain the word. Try as many possibilities as you can think of before you abandon the search. Naturally, the dictionary cannot list incorrect spellings, so don't blame your lack of information on the dictionary!

When you know how to spell a word, finding it in the dictionary is easy. Put your finger on the tab of the thumb index which corresponds to the first letter of your word. This will enable you to open the dictionary immediately at this letter of the alphabet. Now glance at the guide-words in capital letters at the top of the outside and inside columns of each page. If your word falls between these guide-words, it must be on this page.

For example, suppose we look up the word *backgammon*. We put our finger on the B-tab, and the dictionary opens to page 164. The guide-word over the outside column of the following page is *Bacchae*, which means that this is the last word on that page. But *backgammon* begins with *back-*, so it must follow *bacc-*; the reason for this is that k follows c (the first three letters of the words being identical). Words are kept in constant alphabetical order throughout the dictionary by following the letters through the words in this manner.

Turning the page, we find the guide words BACCHANAL and BACKSIDE at opposite sides of both pages. Our word must be between these, for *back-* follows *bacc-* but precedes *backs-*, since the fifth letter of backgammon is g, which comes before s. Backgammon is found in the middle column of page 167.

Suppose now we try to find the word *lazybones*. With the dictionary open at page 167, the thumb index tabs for the letters N to Z only are visible; earlier letters of the alphabet are hidden from view. However, the finger can be slipped under the L-tab at once, because down the right hand edge of page 167, in large black capital letters, are guide-letters which indicate the position of the tabs underneath them. Below L, you can place your finger on the L-tab. The dictionary opens to page 1200.

Glancing through the guide-words at the tops of the columns, we find that *lazybones* should appear on pages 1224-1225, between LAY and LEAD OXIDE. Narrowing it down to page 1225, the word is between LAZERA and LEAD OXIDE. Glancing down the column, we find *lazy-bed*, and, right after it, *lazzarone*. Obviously, *lazybones* should have been between these two entries. Where is it?

In Webster's New International there is a feature called the Divided Page. Across the bottom of each page is a heavy rule; above this rule are three columns of fair-sized type, while below the rule there are six columns of very small type. This Divided Page was instituted to save space, and it is worthy of special explanation.

The upper half of the page—the part in large type—contains the more common or more im-

portant entries. Usually, the word you are looking for will be found in this upper section (as we found *automobile* and *backgammon*). But whenever you do not find your word in the upper part of the page, then *always look in the lower section* for it. You will find that the guide-words at the tops of columns guide you to both the upper and lower sections of each page, so you know that if *lazybones* is not in the upper part of page 1225, it must be in the lower part, according to the guide-words LAZERA and LEAD OXIDE.

Sure enough, there it is. Part of speech, noun. Rare spelling, *lazybone*. Definition, "A lazy person." Marked *Colloq.*, which means that it is used colloquially, which is to say, chiefly in conversation or informal writing.

Rare words, slang words, technical terms, foreign words and phrases, obsolete words, Biblical names (the less important ones), abbreviations, etc., will often be found in the lower part of the Divided Page of Webster's New International. Variant spellings are also listed here, with a reference to the more common or preferred spelling. Much space is saved in this way, and there is the further advantage that the main vocabulary is not cluttered up with little used words which might impede the finding of words more frequently looked up.

In other dictionaries, such little used words, if listed, appear in the regular vocabulary in their proper place. Sometimes they are listed under the main words from which they are derived. Thus, *lazybones* may be found under *lazy*—that is, in the same paragraph-division which contains all the information given about the word *lazy*.

The dictionary lists not only single words, but phrases, or expressions which contain several words, when these phrases are sufficiently differentiated to have the effect of single words. Thus, under the word *potential* you will find, also defined, *potential cautery*, *potential coil* or *winding*, *potential difference*, *potential energy*, *potential function*, *potential mood*, and *potential whole*. It should be noted here that (refer to page 1684, under *potential*) these combination forms are listed in slightly smaller type, with the words that are defined printed in boldface type as usual, but only the first ("potential cautery") spells out the first half of the combination. The others are listed like this: "p. coil, p. difference, p. energy," etc. Wherever a single letter appears like this, it stands for the main word under discussion; this is another space-saving device.

Longer phrases are listed in vocabulary place under the first main word (noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb or verb, as the case may be), or may be found at the end of the definitions of the main word. Take, for example, the expression "to twist round one's finger." The main word is *twist*, a verb. Look up *twist* (page 2222), and there you will find in bold-face type: *to twist round one's finger* or *little finger*, which is defined, "to influence (a person) at will." *To twist the lion's tail* is also listed, and is marked *Slang, U. S.*, which means that its usage is confined to the United States in a slang sense.

Proper names—with the exception of names of persons and geographical names—will be found in the vocabulary order in the same way as other words. All words in the dictionary, when listed, are printed with a small letter

unless the word should be capitalized, when it is, of course, printed with a capital letter. If a word in one sense is capitalized and in another sense is spelled with a small letter, the more usual form may be given as the main entry. For example, *Fuchsia* is listed with a capital F, being the name of a genus of plants, but the common name of the flower is spelled with a small f, so the dictionary adds: "Also [l. c.], a plant or flower of this genus." The letters "l. c." mean "lower case," or small letter; lower case is a printer's name, referring to that part of the type-case containing the small letters. Similarly, *lion*, the usual spelling, is listed with a small l, but definition No. 2 reads: "[cap.] *Astron.* The constellation, or sign, *Leo*." The letters "cap." mean "capital letter." That is, when *Lion* is used astronomically to mean the constellation of that name, it should be spelled with a capital L.

In the New Standard Dictionary (Funk & Wagnalls Company) all proper names are listed in the main vocabulary, in one alphabetical order, without separate classification. This is one of the distinctive features of the New Standard, and it has certain advantages. As a rule, however, geographical names are separated from the main vocabulary and listed in a separate section or gazetteer, as on pages 2379-2486H of Webster's New International. The separate printing of geographical names permits constant revision, and the same is true of the names of persons (biographical entries), which, in Webster's New International, appear in a separate section on pages 2487-2545.

Webster's New International also provides a separate section entitled "Arbitrary Signs Used in Writing and Printing." Here may be found

astronomical signs and their meanings; botanical symbols and their meanings; chemical signs or symbols; mathematical marks and notations; medical and apothecaries' signs and terms; meteorological (weather) signs; miscellaneous typographical signs; monetary and commercial signs; musical signs and marks; topographic signs; typical symbols used in electrical diagrams; and typographical and proof readers' marks.

Various dictionaries provide certain appendices, or separate sections in which are separately classified certain vocabularies that for various reasons have not been made a part of the main vocabulary of the work. It is important that you examine your own dictionary to find out exactly what additional reference facilities of this kind it may contain. There may be a rhyming dictionary, a glossary of Scotch (or other dialectical) terms, names occurring in fiction, a Biblical dictionary, foreign words and phrases, proverbial expressions, state mottoes, tables of flowers and what they stand for, etc., etc.

### OTHER FACTS IN THE DICTIONARY

So far it has been mentioned that a dictionary tells you the correct spelling, proper syllabication, correct pronunciation, parts of speech, etymology or history, and definitions or meanings of any word you may look up in it. These facts will be found about any word that is listed, with the possible exception of the etymology. The history of obscure or obsolete words is not always given, since the editors have felt that the word would be so seldom looked up that it would be better to devote the space thus saved to other more useful information. If the ety-

mology of a word or term is not given, you may often find it by looking up the parts of the phrase, or the elements of the compound word.

*Formation of Plurals.*—Suppose you are in doubt about how to form the plural of a noun or pronoun. Look in the dictionary. Take the word *motto*—you may wonder whether to add *-s* or *-es*. The dictionary tells you, just after the part of speech: “*pl. MOTTOES*,” indicating the pronunciation of the plural form also. The letters “*pl.*” stand for “*plural.*” Now let us look up the word *tobacco*. No plural is listed, therefore the plural is formed simply by adding *-s*, thus: *tobaccos*.

*Note.*—Whenever the dictionary does *not* record the plural form, the plural is normal and is formed simply by adding *-s* to the singular. *Additional example:* Under *thief*, the plural form *THIEVES* is given; but under *chief*, no plural form is given, therefore the plural must be *CHIEFS*.

*Comparison of Adjectives and Adverbs*—Whenever an adjective—for example, *good*—is compared irregularly, the dictionary will indicate the irregular forms immediately after the positive form, in this case *good*. Thus, after *good* you will find: “*compar. BETTER; superl. BEST*,” the abbreviations standing for “*comparative*” and *superlative*,” respectively. You will also find *better* and *best* both listed in their proper alphabetical place in the main vocabulary: “*better, a.; used as compar. of GOOD. best, a.; superl. of GOOD.*”

But with adjectives and adverbs the dictionary goes further. It lists the comparative and superlative forms whether they are regular or irregular. Thus, after the adjective *black*, you

find the forms BLACKER and BLACKEST; after the adjective *low*, you find LOWER and LOWEST; etc. However, when you find such an adjective as *beautiful*, or such an adverb as *beautifully*, the comparative forms are not given because there is no change in the forms of the words. The comparative is formed by using the word *more*, as *more beautiful*; the superlative by using the word *most*, as *most beautiful*. So when the comparative and superlative forms are not given, the rule is to form the comparative with *more*, and the superlative with *most*.

*Principal Parts of Verbs.*—The dictionary indicates the principal parts of every verb, by which are meant the preterite (past tense), past participle and present participle (and verbal noun). Thus, if you look up the verb *shoot*, you will find: "pret. & p. p. SHOT; p. pr. & vb. n. SHOOTING." The abbreviations stand for "preterite and participle past" and "participle present and verbal noun." If the verb forms these parts regularly (as by addition of -d or -ed for the past tense and past participle, and by addition of -ing for the present participle and verbal noun), they are not named, but simply listed, as for the verb *wish*: WISHED, WISHING.

Transitive and intransitive verbs are indicated in the abbreviations for the part of speech. A transitive verb, as you know, takes an object (in the active voice); an intransitive verb may be used without an object. The letters "*v. i.*" signify "verb intransitive," and the letters "*v. t.*" signify "verb transitive."

*Cross References.*—A "cross reference" is a reference to a word appearing elsewhere (in its proper vocabulary place) in the dictionary.

Thus, after *transplant*, in the etymology, you will find the admonition, "See PLANT." This is a cross reference to *plant*. There are many such cross references in every dictionary, and you will find them extremely useful in investigating a word thoroughly.

Cross references may be indicated to provide more information concerning the etymology, to elaborate the definition (meaning), to suggest related words which may be of interest to the reader, or may indicate where more complete listing of synonyms may be found.

*Classification of Words.*—The dictionary often classifies words, or indicates their limitations in use. Thus, before the definition of the word *semicircumferentor* appear the letters "Surv." This abbreviation (by referring to the list in front of the book) is found to mean "Surveying." This word is used, therefore, chiefly in surveying.

Similar abbreviations are used to classify words or indicate in what field or profession they are chiefly used, as follows:

*Agric.*, Agriculture; *Alchem.*, Alchemy; *Alg.*, Algebra; *Anat.*, Anatomy; *Anthrop.*, Anthropology; *Arch.*, Architecture; *Artil.*, Artillery; etc., etc.

*The Standing of Words.*—The dictionary, since it records usage, is useful in determining the standing of a word. Thus, a word may be *obsolete*, which means that it has passed out of current usage, and occurs only in "old" books. If a word is marked *archaic*, it is approaching the obsolete, and may be called "old-fashioned." Many words are marked *rare*, which simply means that they are seldom met with today.

If a word is in bad taste, or so far has been used only a slang sense, it is so marked, by such words as *slang*, *colloquial* (conversational or informal), *dialectical* (a dialectic form), *provincial* (limited to certain regions), etc. Not all of these forms of marking occur in every dictionary; constant use of your own dictionary will familiarize you with the words employed to indicate the nature of the word and its present status in the language.

*Foreign words* are usually marked by a symbol before them, such as two thin vertical lines (Webster's New International). Such foreign words are considered foreign although they occur often enough in English contexts to merit their inclusion in the dictionary. They retain their foreign pronunciation and spelling (with accent marks, if any), and are often printed, when used in English contexts, in italics.

*Variant spellings* are sometimes marked with some other suitable symbol; in Webster's New International a typographical cross is used to mark obsolete variants of current words.

*Quotations.*—The dictionary provides you with innumerable quotations from literature to show how words have actually been used. These quotations are often extremely helpful in clarifying the definitions. In Webster's New International the authors from whom the quotations have been taken are clearly indicated; in the front of the book a complete list of these authors, with data about them, is provided. In the New Standard Dictionary the quotations are cited with author, title, chapter and page, so that a curious reader may find the quotation in the original source if he be so inclined.

When a definition is based upon the occurrence of a word in Shakespeare or Milton, and

this is the only or principal use of the word in such a sense, the definition is followed (in Webster's New International) by the author's name in italics.

*Synonyms.*—Most large dictionaries provide lists of synonyms after the principal words. Thus, on page 437 of Webster's New International, you will find synonyms after *collection*, preceded by the abbreviation *Syn.* These synonyms are discriminated; that is, the difference between *collection* and *congeries* is explained. A cross reference, "See *aggregate*," is also given. Under *collateral*, a cross reference, "See *subordinate*," indicates where synonyms may be found.

*New Words.*—A work such as a dictionary is complete at the time of its first publication, but in any language new words are constantly appearing. The World War brought hundreds of new words into every-day use. Airplanes and their growing popularity are bringing hundreds more into the vocabulary of people everywhere.

A dictionary can be completely revised and reset from start to finish only every two decades or so. Wherever possible, corrections and changes are made within the body of the text for new printings, but much material is too long to be inserted in this way. This new material is usually placed in an Addenda, or section headed *New Words*, in the front (or possibly in the back) of the dictionary. Such a section has its tab in the thumb index so that it may be referred to readily.

If you do not find a word in the main vocabulary (in the upper or lower section of the Divided Page of Webster's New International),

always look for it in the alphabetical list of New Words.

*Illustrations.*—Illustrations are provided throughout the dictionary text to clarify definitions. Often an illustration is a definition in itself, showing the parts of an object, the appearance of an animal or a flower, the shape of a diagram, the various forms in which an object (such as *knife*) may appear, etc. In pictures of animals, plants, insects, and the like, the extent to which the picture has been reduced from life size is often indicated by a fraction, as  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ , etc.

In Webster's New International a classified section of illustrations is provided at the back, where all the illustrations (or the chief ones) pertaining to Agriculture and Horticulture, Anatomy, Antiquities, Architecture, Botany, Carpentry, Heraldry, Mechanical Devices, Musical Instruments, etc., are grouped together for ready reference.

### A WORD ABOUT DICTIONARIES

There are several good dictionaries to be had today. Although this book has based most of its discussion upon Webster's New International Dictionary, this does not mean that there are not other good dictionaries. No two dictionaries are quite alike, of course. Each has its own special features, and these features have certain advantages. The prospective owner of a dictionary must determine for himself which work seems best suited to his needs.

However, it is certain that nearly every public library, no matter how small, will have on hand a copy of either Webster's New International or the New Standard Dictionary. Many

libraries have both of these and other dictionaries besides. Schools and colleges usually have one or the other, or both. Other dictionaries that may be met with are Winston's Simplified Dictionary, Century Dictionary, Worcester Dictionary, Oxford English Dictionary, etc. The Murray Dictionary or the New English Dictionary or the Oxford English Dictionary are all names of the monumental work recently completed (the first part appeared in 1884) which provides a comprehensive and exhaustive historical record of the English language from the middle of the twelfth century to the present. Various abridgments of this gigantic work are now available.

*What is a Webster Dictionary?*—This question must have arisen in the minds of many users of dictionaries, and it should have an explicit answer. In America, of course, the name of Noah Webster is inseparably linked with dictionaries and their compilation. Webster's Dictionary, originally, was the work prepared by, and under the supervision of, Noah Webster. So constantly has the name of Webster been associated with dictionaries that in the language today *Webster* is nearly synonymous with *dictionary*.

The Noah Webster copyrights were purchased by the G. & C. Merriam Company (the Merriam brothers), and Webster Dictionaries, so-called, are now, strictly speaking, the dictionaries of the Merriam series. The copyrights on the original and some of the earlier editions of Noah Webster's dictionaries have expired, however, so that other dictionaries have been based upon his work. A word of warning is not inappropriate here: There have occasionally appeared on the market re-

prints of Webster's early work, characterized as genuine Webster Dictionaries, useful enough in their way, but not up to date or in any way adequate for modern use by the average reader.

In buying a dictionary, be guided by your needs and the recommendation of such authorities as scientists, educators, editors, and so on. Be sure that it is a work with a copyright date within the last fifteen or twenty years, at least.

The features that distinguish Webster's New International Dictionary have been clearly indicated in this book. The largest and most useful abridgment of the New International is Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. For those who prefer something a little larger than the Collegiate, and less expensive than the New International, Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary is recommended. These are all G. & C. Merriam publications.

The New Standard Dictionary is published by Funk & Wagnalls Company of New York City. Its features, in general, are one vocabulary order for all words and names, including biographical and geographical names. It does not maintain a historical order in its definitions, but some people prefer that the more common meaning be given first. A good abridgment of the New Standard Dictionary is the Desk Standard Dictionary. All of the Funk & Wagnalls Dictionaries tend to favor reformed or revised spellings, though the established spellings are given preferred vocabulary listings. The pronunciations are given in two systems of phonetic alphabets or diacritical marks, though one is inclined to wonder just what advantage accrues from this.

### OTHER REFERENCE WORKS

A dictionary of the English language is the most essential of all reference works. It is, as a matter of fact, the first place to look when in search of information, for here, in concise form, the fundamental facts are sure to be found.

As distinguished from an unabridged dictionary, there are many smaller and specialized dictionaries, as has already been mentioned. These include dictionaries of various special subjects, professions, dialects, or foreign languages.

A *polyglot dictionary* is one in which words listed in one language are defined in several languages; or a dictionary in which words are listed in several languages and defined in one language; or some variation in which more than two languages are represented.

A *glossary* is an alphabetical dictionary of words or terms limited to a certain group or class or subject. A *vocabulary* is a list of words in which the definitions are incomplete, or when the words themselves are few in number, or when some of the words are defined and others are not. An *index* is an alphabetical list of the words to be found in some single book or author, with reference to the pages or chapters in or on which they occur. A *concordance* is an alphabetical arrangement of the words to be found in one book or in all the works of one author, together with a listing of the phrases containing each word in its every occurrence, and where it may be found in the source.

There are pronouncing dictionaries, dictionaries of synonyms, phrases, similes, rhyming dictionaries, etc. A *thesaurus* is a kind of dictionary in which words are classified by relationship of meaning, instead of strictly alphabetically. The *thesaurus* groups together all words pertaining, for example, to religion, the mind, ghosts, or any other classification which seems desirable. It is extremely useful for tracing related words, finding synonymous expressions, or locating words which have slipped the mind if the general subject to which the word refers is remembered.

An *encyclopedia*, usually in several volumes, is a work in which information is classified by subjects arranged alphabetically. The subjects are explained in more or less exhaustive articles or essays, replete with diagrams, illustrations, maps, etc., as may be necessary.

Perhaps the most widely used *encyclopedia* today is the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,\* of which the Fourteenth Edition has just appeared. There are also the *Encyclopedia Americana*, the *New International Encyclopaedia*, *Nelson's Encyclopedia*, *Compton's Encyclopaedia*, etc., each with its own features and limitations. *Encyclopedias* sometimes limit themselves to certain subjects, as biography, philosophy, religion, etc.

The rules or suggestions for using an *encyclopedia* are simple. The articles are arranged alphabetically by subjects, with guide-words at

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\*The subtitle of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is "A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature, and General Information." This demonstrates that it, too, is, as was said, a kind of *dictionary*.

32 HOW TO USE THE DICTIONARY

the tops of the pages, and guide-letters on each volume to indicate the contents. However, it is wise to get in the habit of using the Index, which is usually in a volume by itself. This Index is exhaustive, with cross references, and shows immediately the volume number, page, and section of the page on which the desired information may be found.





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